A corpus-driven analysis of certainty stance adverbs: obviously, really and actually in spoken native and learner English

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1. Introduction

The expression of stance is a central component in human spoken communication, including L2 communication in the context of language learning. Biber et al. (1999) identified stance adverbs as a linguistic feature used for so-called personal tasks, that is, the expression of "individual attitudes, thoughts and feelings of the speaker" (966). This type of personal task is particularly common in conversations and, consequently, the expression of one's opinions in speaking tasks has been given great importance in L2 curricula. However, the use of stance adverbs within these tasks has received little attention. This can be explained, among other reasons, by a lack of general pedagogic interest in the pragmatics of spoken communication in L2 acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig 2013, Gablasova et al. 2016), which may have contributed to what has been described as pragmatic fossilization (Romero-Trillo, 2002).

Corpus-based studies have already shown that adverb use appears to be a challenging area for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners with different L1s, including EFL German (Götz & Shilk 2011, Lorenz 1999), Dutch (de Haan 1999), French (Granger 1998, Osborne 2008), Italian (Philip 2008), and Spanish learners (Gabrielatos & McEnery 2005, Author 2010). Comparisons between native (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) adverb use have also been carried out mainly by analysing written texts and by providing accounts of NNSs over or under adverb use (Author 2014) as compared to that of NSs. Nevertheless, few corpus-based analyses have examined contrastively how NSs and NNSs of English use adverbs in spoken English in exactly the same speaking task. In one of the scarce studies comparing the same task, Aijmer (2011) reported similar frequency of *well* as a pragmatic marker in Swedish advanced speakers of English of the Louvain International

Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI) (De Cock 1998) and NSs of the Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation (LOCNEC). However, her analysis revealed that the underlying pragmatic reasons for these uses were significantly different (see also Müller 2004). This finding suggests that, although important, overall frequency of use alone can only reveal some of the aspects that may potentially play a role in how adverbs are used in speaking tasks, while pragmatic studies might be necessary to illustrate adverb use further.

The use of the same task can also provide comparable corpora which allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how different communicative situations and language use interface. For example, Mukherjee (2009) compared the language of LOCNEC NSs and LINDSEI German NNSs on the same speaking tasks and revealed different approaches to performance phenomena, including extra speech planning pressure in the learner data as evidenced by the additional disfluencies found after clause initial repeats. Author (2015) further explored the differences between different LINDSEI NNSs and the extended LOCNEC (Aguado et al. 2012) NSs and found that the LINDSEI Spanish and German speakers understood the picture task in this corpus as requiring more involvement than the NSs, as evidenced by their scores of Dimension 1 in the Multidimensional (MD) Analysis (Biber 1988) performed. This dimension is of particular relevance as one of the most fundamental functions of spoken communication is the expression of one's point of view (Biber et al. 1999). Texts and registers scoring high on Biber´s (1988) Dimension 1 such as phone or face to face conversations are characterized by the statistically significant presence of involvement features such as 1st and 2nd personal pronouns, question tags, and, among others, different types of stance markers including stance adverbs.

Our research, grounded on contrastive interlanguage analysis (Granger 2012), follows this line of research emphasizing the possible differences between NS vs NNS adverb use, and among the different NNS groups in the same task. This paper examines the uses of some of the most frequent certainty stance adverbs during the picture description task in three datasets of the LINDSEI (Chinese, German and Spanish components) and in the extended LOCNEC (Aguado et al.

2012) mentioned above. In particular, our research explores the contexts of use of *obviously, really* and *actually* by NSs and NNSs across the same speaking task in the four datasets. Those three stance adverbs were selected because they were the most frequent in our NS corpus. The motivation behind this research is to assess whether certainty adverbs follow the same pattern of use across groups. This paper can, thus, shed light on NS vs NNS adverb use in English spoken communication and may have potential implications for the teaching of certainty adverbs to different NNS groups.

In this paper, we will provide a literature review of previous work on stance adverbs usage by NSs and NNSs and their pragmatic meanings. In particular, we will focus on the three most frequent certainty stance adverbs in our NS data. Secondly, we will describe the research methodology and the results obtained. Thirdly, we will discuss the results and, finally, supply a conclusion with some pedagogical implications.

2. The expression of stance

2.1. Stance: definition and scope

Although the study of the expression of stance in English has been successful in attracting the attention of researchers, the exact extent of the concept is difficult to narrow down. Biber and Finegan (1988) explained *stance* as covering a broad range of functions "including expression of certainty, generalization, actuality [and] the indication of the degree of commitment towards their truthfulness" (2). Linguistic expressions of stance serve to convey how certain the writers feel and also what perspective they take towards a proposition (Biber 2006).

Corpus-based approaches have focused on lexical and grammatical stance-marking patterns and mostly on academic written registers (Alonso - Almeida 2012, Peacock 2015). In contrast, studies comparing written and spoken registers are fewer and have shown that overt stance expressions are more prevalent in variety and density in spoken and in personal registers than in academic registers (Biber & Finnegan 1988, 1989; Biber 2006). This has been attributed to the fact that "in most

English-speaking cultures, it is generally assumed that the attitudes and evaluations of the speaker will be of interest to the interlocutors" (Biber 2015: 2). The linguistic mechanisms used to express stance include the use of verbs (Thompson & Yiyun 1991, Hunston 1994, Hyland 2002), adverbials (Biber & Finegan 1988, Biber et al. 1999, Conrad & Biber 2000, Hyland 1996), complement clause constructions (Biber et al. 1999, Biber 2015) and metadiscourse features (Hyland 2002, 2004). In general, adverbs realize many of the different types of stance in English (Biber et al. 1999). Epistemic stance adverbs are used to express varying degrees of certainty (obviously, really) and the degree of likelihood (probably, possibly, maybe). Attitude stance adverbs are used to convey the speaker's attitude towards a proposition (fortunately, surprisingly), usually in initial or final position in the clause. Finally, style stance adverbs convey the speaker's manner of speaking (sincerely, simply).

2.2. Stance and certainty adverbs in native and non-native discourse: unpacking pragmatic features

Research in the area of stance adverbs use has focused mainly on written registers and has reflected a methodological tension between quantitative accounts of frequency and qualitative analyses of contexts of use. The findings of studies comparing the written expression of stance by NSs and NNSs (Hyland & Milton 1997, Schleppegrell 2004) support the fact that L2 writers tend to rely on a more limited range of adverbials and use more certainty markers, while native writers appear to use a greater range of adverbs and express more doubt meanings. For example, Liu and Ren (2012) analysed the use of stance adverbs in Chinese and English students' academic writings and concluded that Chinese students used fewer stance adverbs and in different positions. Çakır (2016) corroborated that English writers used more stance adverbs than Turkish writers in research article abstracts. However, there are studies that have questioned NSs' increased use of stance adverbs. For example, Hinkel (2003) reported a higher use of amplifiers and downtoners in the written essays of advanced Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Indonesian students as compared to the written essays of first year native students. Similarly, Gilquin et al. (2007) reported overuse of adverbs expressing a high degree

of certainty as well as underuse of common hedging adverbs in non-native academic writing. More recently, Zhang and Sabet (2014) have argued that epistemic stance is expressed in different ways by NSs and NNSs. Bartley and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2016) have also reported differences in the frequency of occurrence of probability and certainty adverbs between NNSs and NSs, but have pointed out there were also differences between school and university NSs, and among NNSs with different L1.

Comparatively, spoken communication has received less attention. Biber and Staples (2014) analysed the occurrence of stance adverbs in the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (Cheng et al. 2008) and found similar patterns of use of the different categories of stance adverbs (epistemic [certainty and degree of likelihood], attitude and style), but different quantity of use of specific adverbs within each of those categories. Compared to previous studies on written registers, certainty adverbs were more common than degree of likelihood adverbs for both NSs and NNSs. The authors found that the most frequently used adverbs were *actually*, *maybe* and *probably* with frequencies of use higher than 1 per 1,000 word*, obviously* with frequencies of 0.3-0.4 per 1,000 words and *perhaps* with frequencies of 0.1-0.2 per 1,000 words. Among the differences in use between NSs and NNSs, *maybe* and *actually* were used more frequently by NNSs, while *obviously* was used more by NSs, especially in interviews. *Probably* was used more frequently by NSs, while *really* was used by NSs and NNSs alike, especially in conversations. Biber and Staples argued that the most common adverbs are in the process of losing their core meaning, and are taking on "different discourse functions" (285). Another study (Author, 2010) comparing the frequency of adverbs in spoken discourse surveyed the occurrence of degree adverbs (amplifiers and downtoners), emphatic adverbs and adverbs functioning as discourse particles (well, anyway, etc.) of Spanish learners of English as compared to NSs. Differences in the use of amplifiers were discovered as they were not a significant part of the non-native active spoken lexical repertoire as opposed to NS speech. Downtoners and emphatic adverbs were virtually neglected by both NSs and NNSs, which may suggest a task effect in the dataset.

Apart from attesting the different distribution and frequency of stance adverbs between NSs and NNSs, research has also shown that the uses of stance adverbs may encompass different semantic and pragmatic classifications. Simon-Vandenbergen and Aijmer (2007) offered a description of adverbs of certainty in present-day British English using the British component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB). The authors maintain that certainty is a complex concept that goes beyond the "epistemic definition" (322), and provide evidence that other semantic notions such as probability, inference and expectation are involved. In fact, the spoken medium seems to favour the use of certain meanings. Biber (2006) analysed the expression of stance in the TOEFL 2000 Spoken and Written Academic Language (T2K-SWAL) Corpus and reported a higher reliance on certainty (*obviously*, *actually* and *really*) and doubt or probability adverbs (*probably*, *maybe*) in spoken than in written registers. Biber also found that the use of certainty adverbs has become more emphatic than epistemic, expressing "high personal involvement, emphasizing the attitudes and expected activities of the instructor" (106). Other authors have also reported variations in the meanings of some certainty adverbs. For example, Aijmer (2008) analysed *obviously* and *definitely* in the context of modal adverbs use in spoken interaction in the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language. In her paper, *obviously* was used with four different meanings across different English corpora: (i) expression of evidential meaning; (ii) expression of apparent, weak perceptual evidence; (iii) expression of presuppositional meaning based on the speaker's assumptions and (iv) expression of solidarity within a closely-knit group. The evidential meaning of this adverb was found to be less used in favour of a "social function to signal speakers' shared values and attitudes" (Aijmer 2008: 81), which confirms previous findings that the core meanings of certainty adverbs are acquiring new, more complex meanings in oral communication.

Myers (2010) studied stance-taking in blogs and analysed the overuse of *really* and *actually* in that genre. He described three functions of *really*: as a booster, as a sceptical response to something said earlier, or to express doubt or surprise. *Actually* was mainly used to show contrast with a previous statement or expectation. Waters (2008) analysed the use of all adverbs marking realness present in the

Toronto English Archive, a corpus of spoken data based on 115 sociolinguistic interviews and she concluded that, although there were five variants to express realness (*actually*, *indeed*, *as a matter of fact*, *in fact* and *really*), "the variation in the system […] as a whole is mainly achieved between *actually* and *really*" (33), thus confirming the overuse of these two adverbs reported in Myers (2010). However, Waters expanded the meaning of *actually* indicating it is linked to its position in the sentence. She mentioned that it was used to express disagreement, transition in discourse (elaboration or clarification), slight change of topic, or unexpectedness when it is placed in clausal positions, while it was used to indicate realness, disagreement and emphasis when placed in phrasal positions. She also expanded the meanings of *really* used by Myers (2010) to include *really* used as interchangeable with *actually*.

Even though there have been comparisons of NS and NNS production and use of stance adverbs in written and spoken registers, the effect of task has been largely ignored. Considering that SLA research has generally concluded that task effect affects language production and Biber et al. (2014) have confirmed its significant effect in total number of adverbs used, there is an important lack of research on the effect of task in the use of stance adverbs. A notable exception is Gablasova et al.'s (2016) study, which focused on three major lexico-grammatical groups of epistemic markers - verbal, adverbial, and adjectival markers - in the context of spoken L2. The authors made use of quantitative methods only and looked at a subset of the Trinity Lancaster Corpus. In the group of adverbials, these authors included adverbs such as *actually*, *apparently*, *certainly*, *obviously* or, among others, *perhaps*. The authors researched the effect of different speaking tasks on L2 speakers' use of epistemic stance markers and concluded that there was a significant difference between the monologic prepared tasks and every other task, and between the dialogic general topic and the dialogic pre-selected topic ($p < .05$). This study suggests that the type of speaking task conditions speakers' repertoire of markers, including certainty markers.

Given the inconclusive findings regarding the frequency of certainty adverbs in spoken registers among NS and NNS groups, and the reported variation in meaning

of some of those adverbs, this research aims at expanding our understanding of the use of certainty stance adverbs in spoken registers by analysing the way NSs and three different L1 (Chinese, Spanish and German) advanced English speakers use them when carrying out the same oral task. The research questions that guided our research were the following:

RQ 1: Does NSs' certainty stance adverb use differ from those of NNSs?

RQ 2: If so, how is that use different between NSs and NNSs, and among different NNS groups?

3. Methodology

3.1. Data sets

This article used two data sets. The Chinese, Spanish, and German components of the LINDSEI (De Cock 1998, Brand & Kämmerer 2006) provided the NNS data, whereas the extended LOCNEC corpus (Aguado et al. 2012) provided the NS data. The two corpora were compiled following the same LINDSEI interview format. Each interview included three tasks: a set topic, a free discussion and a picture description. Only the third part of the interview, the picture description, was used in this study.

The picture task component of the LINDSEI includes a total of 15,791 words in the Chinese (n = 53) component, 11% (1,806) produced by the interviewer. The Spanish component (n = 47) comprises 20,326 words, of which 24% (4,914) had been generated by the interviewer. Finally, the German component (n = 50) has 21,816 words, of which 26% (5,669) had been provided by the interviewer. As the interviewers were NSs of English and consequently their use of adverbs could not be considered learner language data, the interviewers' productions were eliminated. The final learner corpus consisted of 45,544 words: 13,985 words in the Chinese component, 15,412 in the Spanish part and 16,147 words in the German constituent.

The NS control corpus used in our analysis was also the picture description task in the extended LOCNEC (n= 78), which consists of the LOCNEC and the British component of the Contrastive Analysis of Orality in Spoken English (CAOS-E) corpus (Aguado et al. 2012). The LOCNEC consists of 90,300 words of interviews conducted with 50 NSs of English, all of them undergraduate and graduate students at Lancaster University in the UK. The British component of the CAOS-E corpus comprises 21,509 words contributed by 28 undergraduate students at Manchester Metropolitan University. The third tasks of both corpora include a total of 13,301 words, of which 20% (2649) are interviewers' contributions. The interviewers´ turns were eliminated in order to make the data comparable and comprised only of interviewees' language. Consequently, a resulting corpus of native speech of 10,652 words was analysed.

3.2. Method of analysis

The four sets of data were uploaded and analysed with Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014). Using the POS tag "RB", a list of adverbs was retrieved from each corpus. First, the total number of occurrences of adverbs in each set was counted and normalized to a standard rate per 1,000 words. Secondly, the occurrences of each adverb were counted and normalised, and thirdly, the most common certainty adverbs in the NS corpus (*obviously*, *really* and *actually*) were selected. The selection for the analysis of those adverbs was grounded on different reasons. First, the fact that previous research has reported that they are the most frequent in various spoken datasets (Biber 1998, 2006). Secondly, they have been shown to have very different frequencies of use between NS and NNS in spoken discourse: *actually* was reported to be used more by NNSs, *obviously* by NSs and *really* similarly by NSs and NNSs (Biber & Staples, 2014). Third, there have been claims regarding certainty adverbs are used for more emphatic functions (Biber, 2006), and, finally, they seem to be acquiring new and more complex meanings (Aijmer, 2008; Myers, 2010; Waters, 2008).

A quantitative and qualitative contrastive analysis of *obviously, really,* and *actually* was carried out. First, frequency and occurrences of the three adverbs

selected were calculated. Secondly, the categorizations (see Table 1) used in Aijmer (2008) for *obviously,* Myers (2010) for *really,* and Waters (2008) for *actually* were selected to be used for the coding of pragmatic functions of each occurrence of the adverbs in the four datasets.

Table 1. Pragmatic uses of *obviously*, *really,* and *actually*.

	Obviously	
1	Evidential meaning	Strong evidentiality. Evidence is presented in discourse.
2	Weak perceptual evidence	Obviously comes close to apparently in meaning. The function of obviously is distancing.
3	Authority	No evidential meaning is provided. The speakers try to give some authority to their statement.
4	Solidarity within a closely-knit group	Obviously is associated with positive rather than negative politeness and with solidarity rather than power or imposition.
	Really	
1	Booster	Intensifying function.
2	Sceptical response to something said earlier	Typically, before a comma, full stop or question mark.
3	Doubt or surprise	The speaker expresses doubt or surprise about what has been just said. Used with a question mark.
4	Factually true meanings	Used as synonym of *actually.*
5	Other uses	Meaning/function not clear.
	Actually	
1	Disagreement	Actually is used to signal disagreement.
2	Transition in discourse (elaboration or clarification)	Used when one utterance is functioning as an elaboration or clarification of another. Actually links an utterance to a previous one.
3	Slight change of topic	Actually marks transition in discourse. Sentence level.
4	Unexpectedness	Typically in initial clausal position, actually links the utterance that follows it to the preceding context.
5	Factually true or realness	Core lexical meaning of realness.
6	Emphasis	Actually used for emphasis, shared familiarity of information and solidarity.

All the occurrences of the three adverbs were analysed and categorised according to pragmatic meaning (see Table 1) by the two authors of the paper independently. A Cohen's Kappa of 0.901 indicated that interrater reliability was very high, but varied depending on the adverb (0.719 *actually,* 0.962 *obviously* and 1 *really*). This high interrater reliability was most probably due to two reasons: first, both raters had previously agreed on the categorizations to be used which were based on previous research on each of the adverbs, and plenty of examples and a very thorough explanation of each use were provided in those articles, and, secondly, the four groups exhibited very little variation in their use of the three adverbs, almost restricted to their classic epistemic meaning. Nevertheless, there were still cases of disagreement, and a third rater analysed the occurrences needing moderation.

There were sixteen problematic cases which needed moderation: three problematic cases (5, 9%) of *obviously* in the NS dataset, seven occurrences (18,9%) of *actually* in the NS group, and six (14,3%) in the German group. When the two initial raters disagreed on the pragmatic meaning of any occurrence, the third rater coded it. If the coding of two of the three raters coincided, that meaning became the final coding of the adverb. This happened with all the occurrences of the adverb *obviously*, with six of the seven occurrences of the adverb *actually* in the NS group and with two of the six occurrences of *actually* in the German group. If the three raters assigned a different pragmatic function to an occurrence, which happened with one case of *actually* in the NS group and four in the German group, that occurrence was discussed taking into account a wider context until a final coding was agreed on.

The position of the adverb was also analysed by the same two initial raters. The positions considered were (i) clausal, and within clausal, initial or final, (ii) phrasal; and (iii) ambiguous. An inter-rater agreement of 100% was reached for position so the third rater did not analyse position.

Finally, a Kruskal-Wallis H test analysis was carried out to explore whether there were significant differences in the frequency of adverbs and in the use of each

of the three certainty adverbs selected. Pairwise comparisons were carried out to determine frequency differences between groups of speakers.

4. Results

4.1. Frequency of certainty adverbs

As can be seen in Table 2, the frequency of *obviously*, *really* and *actually* was quite different across groups.

Table 2. Occurrences (n) of certainty adverbs per group of speakers at a normalised frequency of 1,000

	obviously	*really*	*actually*
NS	4.69	3.85	3.47
CH	0.07	2.07	0.72
SP	0.06	4.54	0.19
GE	0.43	7.74	2.60

In the NS corpus, *obviously* was the most common (4.69) followed by *really* (3.85) and *actually* (3.47). On the contrary, *obviously* was rare within NNSs (0.43 in the German group, 0.07 in the Chinese group and 0.06 in the Spanish). *Really* was the most common certainty adverb in all the NNS groups (7.74 normalised occurrences in the German group, 4.54 in the Spanish group and 2.07 in the Chinese group), followed by *actually* (2.60 in the German group, 0.72 in the Chinese group and 0.19 in the Spanish group).

4.1.1. Obviously

As it has already been mentioned, *obviously* was the most common certainty adverb in the NS corpus, whereas it was rarely used in the three NNS groups (see Table 2). Its pragmatic meanings were categorized based on Aijmer (2008). *Obviously* was considered as (see Table 1 for further details and Aijmer, 2008 for a thorough discussion and further examples):

(i) expression of evidential meaning (see Example 1);

(1) (CH0122) painter to paint paint her portrait but (erm) *obviously* Linda is not is not a good-looking girl

(ii) expression of apparent, weak perceptual evidence (see Example 2);

(2) (LOCNEC_45) know what they think of it erm well they *obviously* think er it doesn't look like her

(iii) expression of authority and (iv) expression of solidarity within a closely-knit group. No example of the last two meanings was found in our data set.

Table 3. Pragmatic meaning/function and position of *obviously* across groups

	Pragmatic Uses				Position			
	Evidential meaning	Weak inference	Authority	Solidarity	Clausal Initial	Clausal final	Phrasal	Ambiguous
NS	96%	4%	0%	0%	20%	6%	74%	0%
CH	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
SP	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
GE	86%	14%	0%	0%	29%	29%	43%	0%

As can be seen in Table 3, *obviously* was mostly used to indicate evidential meaning in all groups and scarcely to indicate weak inference by native (4%) and German (14%) speakers. NSs used it mainly in phrasal position (74%) while NNSs used it in initial (Chinese and Spanish 100%, and German speakers 29%) or final clausal positions (German speakers 29%) mostly. Therefore, NSs and NNSs used *obviously* with the same meaning but they favoured different positions, NSs used it mainly in phrasal position, German speakers nearly equally in both positions, but Chinese and Spanish used it only in clausal initial position.

Regarding the quantity of speakers in all the groups who used the adverb, there are big differences among NSs and NNSs: 27 NSs (34,6% [17 speakers only once, 3 twice, 4 three times and only 1 speaker used the adverb four, five and six times each]), 1 Chinese (1.8%), 1 Spanish (2%), and 6 German speakers (12% [5 speakers once and one speaker twice]) used *obviously* in the picture task description. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that frequency of use was statistically

significantly different among the different groups, $\chi 2(3) = 35.5$, $p = .001$. Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were performed using a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in median frequency counts between the NS group and the three NNS groups: the Chinese and the NS English (36.6) ($p = .001$), the Spanish and the NS (-36.3) ($p = .001$), and the German and the NS (25.3) ($p = .004$). However, no significant differences were found among the NNS groups.

4.1.2. Really

Following Myers (2010), *really* was categorised as (see Table 1 for further details and Myers, 2010 for a thorough discussion and further examples):

(i) a booster (see Example 3):

> (3) (CH0107) (erm) Mister Chen Miss Mrs Miss Chen is *really* not a very beautiful girl . (erm) but she

(ii) a sceptical response to something said earlier (no example in our data),

(iii) to express doubt or surprise (see Example 4) :

> (4) (CH0128) said oh it doesn't like you Mary said oh *really* . (em) maybe you should (eh) see a little

(iv) factually true, actually uses (see Example 5):

> (5) (SP0148) picture because she doesn't like like she is *really* and in the third er: (er) she has

(v) Other (when the meaning was unclear) (see Example 6):

> (6) (LOCNEC_22) was very very proud of her picture but yet *really* probably saying that the artist hadn't
>
> (SP0102) he thinks that that the picture is like .*really* (em) . it's a . a faithful representation

Table 4 offers the pragmatic meanings and position of *really* across the four corpora analysed.

Table 4. Pragmatic meaning and position of *really* across groups

	Pragmatic Uses					Position				
	Booster, emphatic, degree	Sceptical response	Doubt, surprise	Factually true, actually	Other uses	Clausal	Clausal Initial	Clausal final	Phrasal	Ambiguous
NS	80%	0%	0%	17%	2%	0%	2%	12%	80%	5%
CH	86%	0%	3%	7%	3%	0%	0%	7%	83%	10%
SP	95%	0%	0%	3%	2%	0%	0%	5%	92%	3%
GE	94%	0%	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%	2%	93%	2%

As illustrated in Table 2, *really* was the most common stance adverb in all the NNS groups. Pragmatically (see Table 4), it was almost exclusively used as a booster or emphatic marker by both NSs and NNSs. It was also used to express that something was factually true with the meaning of *actually* by all groups, but more commonly in the NS group (17%) and very scarcely in the NNS groups (7% Chinese, 3% Spanish and 2% German speakers). It was also used by Chinese (3%) and German (1%) speakers to express doubt or surprise.

Confirming previous research (Waters 2008), *really* favoured phrasal positions and was used in that position most of the times (80% NSs, 83% Chinese, 92% Spanish and 93% German). NSs also used it in initial and final clausal positions, but the NNS groups only in final position and very rarely (7% Chinese, 5% Spanish and 2% Germans). There was also an occurrence of *really* as the only constituent of an utterance, coded as Clausal in Table 4, in the German group.

Regarding the quantity of speakers in all the groups who used the adverb, important differences can be observed: 26 NSs (33% [16 speakers once, 6 twice, 3 speakers three times and 1 speaker four times]), 14 Chinese (26.4% [6 speakers once, 2 speakers twice, 5 speakers three times and 1 speaker four times]), 25 Spanish (53.2% [10 speakers once, 7 twice, 3 three times, and 1 speaker used the adverb four, five, seven, ten and eleven times each]), and 40 German speakers (80% [11 speakers once, 12 twice, 5 three times, 3 speakers four times, 3 speakers five times, 3 speakers six times and was used seven, nine and fourteen times by 1

speakers]) used *really* in the picture task description. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that frequency of use was statistically significantly different among the different groups, $\chi 2(3) = 45.3$, $p = .001$. Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were performed using a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, which revealed statistically significant differences in median frequency counts between the German and all the other groups: the Chinese and the German (-67.9) ($p = .001$), the NS and the German (-65.0) ($p = .001$), and the Spanish and the German (-36.8) ($p = .015$).

4.1.3. Actually

Based on Waters (2008), the pragmatic meanings considered for *actually* were (see Table 1 for further details and Waters, 2008 for a thorough discussion and further examples):

(i) disagreement (see Example 7):

> (7) (GE0145) are admiring it (mm) ... no actually *actually* not .. the man doesn't look doesn't look

(ii) transition in discourse (elaboration or clarification) (see Example 8):

> (8) (SP0135) down and: on the portrait yes it is (er) *actually*. maybe after the: the quarrel (er) the

(iii) slight change of topic (see Example 9):

> (9) (GE0134) <looks at pictures> <8 sec break> well .*actually* it's the story about . a lady who wanted

(iv) unexpectedness (see Example 10):

> (10) (CH0153) her to make her seem more beautiful but *actually* it's not it's not the fact ... but the woman

(v) factually true or realness(see Example 11) :

> (11) (LOCNEC_9) pointing to it but that's how her mouth was *actually* when she used to and he's just like oh

and (vi) emphasis (see Example 12) :

(12) (GE0105) image of yourself (erm) . yes I do *actually* .. (erm). I would just like to be more

As can be seen in Table 5, *actually* was the adverb that showed a wider variety of meanings in all the groups. The most common pragmatic meaning of *actually* was the expression of something being factually true followed by elaboration or clarification that was also used by all groups. The meaning of unexpectedness was used mainly by Chinese speakers (20%), and very rarely by NSs (3%) and German (2%) speakers. Its emphatic use appeared in the Spanish (19%), the NS (16%) and the German (6%) set of the data, while none of the groups used it to express disagreement or to introduce a slight change of topic.

Table 5. Pragmatic meaning and position of *actually* across groups

	Pragmatic Uses						Position			
	Disagreement	Elaboration or clarification	Slight change of topic	Unexpectedness	Factually true	Emphasis	Clausal Initial	Clausal final	Phrasal	Ambiguous
NS	0%	8%	0%	3%	62%	27%	8%	22%	68%	3%
CH	0%	20%	0%	20%	60%	0%	60%	0%	40%	0%
SP	0%	33%	0%	0%	33%	33%	33%	67%	0%	0%
GE	5%	19%	5%	2%	60%	10%	24%	7%	62%	7%

Similarly to *really*, *actually* was mainly used in phrasal position by NS (68%) and German (62%) speakers, whereas both Chinese and Spanish speakers used it more in clausal position (60% CH and 100% SP). When in clausal position, NSs and Spanish speakers favoured final clausal position (22% vs 8%, and 67% vs. 33% respectively), while German and Chinese speakers favoured initial position (24% vs 7% GE and 60% Chinese).

Regarding the quantity of speakers in all the groups who used the adverb, there are big differences between the NSs and the German group, and the other two groups: 19 NSs (24.4% [9 speakers once, 5 speakers twice and 6 speakers three times]), 7 Chinese (13.2% [5 speakers once, and 1 speaker twice and another three times]), 3 Spanish (6.3% [once each of the 3 speakers]), and 22 German speakers

(44% [13 once, 3 speakers twice, 6 speakers three times and 1 speaker once]) used *actually* in the picture task description. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that frequency of use was statistically significantly different among the different groups, $\chi 2(3) = 26.1$, $p = .001$. Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were performed using a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, which revealed statistically significant differences in median frequency counts between the German and all the other groups: the Chinese and the German (-38.1) ($p = .001$), the NS and the German (-24.1) ($p = .035$), and the Spanish and the German (-46.1) ($p = .001$).

5. Discussion

5.1. Do NSs' certainty stance adverb uses differ from those of NNSs?

Our analysis indicates that our three adverbs behave in a different way in each set of data, and that the tendency of use seems to vary within each adverb. Only NSs used the three certainty adverbs frequently, while only *really* was used by the three NNS groups frequently, *actually* was only used frequently by German and NSs and *obviously* was used rarely by all three NNS groups. This pattern of use seems to indicate that the difference in the use of certainty adverbs does not take place only between NSs and NNSs, but also among the three groups of NNS. This finding questions previous analyses which have limited comparisons to NSs vs NNSs (Author, 2010; Zhang & Sabet, 2014), while corroborating previous research indicating there are differences among NNSs (Bartley & Hidalgo - Tenorio, 2016).

The differences illustrated here may also indicate the need for further adverb use instruction so that NNSs are able to use a wider range of adverbs instead of focusing on *really* when expressing certainty. Let us discuss our second research question in detail.

5.2. How is the use different between NSs and NNSs and among different groups of NNSs?

5.2.1. *Obviously*

Corroborating previous studies (Biber & Staples 2014, Bartley & Hidalgo-Tenorio 2016), our results show that this adverb was only used frequently by the NS group, very infrequently by Germans and very rarely by Spanish and Chinese LINDSEI speakers (see Table 2). This finding is of interest as the word itself is categorised as B1 by both the Vocabulary English Profile and the English Grammar Profile and this is arguably a level well below the communicative competence of LINDSEI speakers. The Kruskal-Wallis test and the post-hoc analyses confirmed that the NSs used this adverb significantly more frequently than all the NNS groups in our study, and that no significant differences could be found among the three LINDSEI groups.

The only meaning used by all 4 groups of speakers was that of physical evidence and, to a lesser extent, weak inference (NSs and German speakers) (see Table 3). No authority or solidarity meanings were found in our corpora. This contrasts with Aijmer (2008) who found that the English teenager speakers favoured the use of *obviously* as a marker to signal shared attitudes and values. It seems that the picture description task did not offer the opportunity for these two meanings to emerge, even in the NS group where both interviewers and interviewees shared the same L1. Consequently, we suggest that the picture task created the conditions for the almost exclusive use of evidential meanings. This finding is in contrast with Simon-Vandenbergen and Aijmer´s (2007) claim that the expression of certainty in modern English goes beyond epistemic meanings. While we could confirm some instances of weak inference, especially in the German group, the uses of *obviously* in our data favour the expression of a very restricted set of meanings. A possible explanation for the scarce use of this adverb by NNSs might be differences in the speakers´ roles (Gablasoba & Brezina 2015, Liddicoat 2016), which may prevent NNSs from using an adverb implying strong evidence or equal status by indicating shared attitudes and values.

Interestingly, the position of *obviously* in the NS corpus favoured phrasal constructions (74%) while in the German corpus positions displayed a more complex behaviour: 43% in phrasal position and 29% both in initial and final clause positions (see Table 3). However, the very few examples of *obviously* in the learner corpora make it difficult to discuss this finding.

5.2.2 *Really*

Really was the most frequent certainty adverb in all the NNS groups and was also frequently used by NSs. However, it was significantly less frequently (see Table 2) used by English speakers than by German speakers as the post-hoc analysis confirmed. Despite the lower frequency of use in the NS data, these speakers showed a more diversified use of the adverb (see Table 4): 17% of the occurrences displayed factually or actually meanings, while in 80% of the occurrences booster-related uses were found. This was not the case in the learner groups, which tended to concentrate their uses more on the expression of booster-related meanings.

Regarding its position (see Table 4), all groups showed a preference for phrasal position confirming previous research (Waters 2008). However, NSs displayed the highest rate (14%) of uses in clausal positions, while the NNSs used that position very rarely (CH 7%, SP 5% and GE 2%). Chinese LINDSEI speakers presented 10% of cases where the position was ambiguous, which may suggest that they see this adverb position as more mobile than the rest of the speakers.

The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that German speakers displayed higher frequency of use during the picture task than any other group, and that no significant differences were found between NSs and the Chinese and the Spanish. Our findings corroborate Biber´s (2006) and Biber and Stapler's (2014) conclusion that *really* is used by both NNSs and NSs. This also seems to confirm Author's (2015) finding that German and Spanish LINDSEI speakers displayed higher involvement during the picture task, as they were the groups that used *really* the most. It may be argued that the preference for *really* as a booster by all LINDSEI speakers, an A2 vocabulary item according to the English Vocabulary Profile, may suggest that other more advanced (B1) factually uses tended to be neglected, in particular by Spanish and German speakers.

5.2.3. *Actually*

Actually was used frequently only by NSs and German NNSs. The German LINDSEI speakers definitely appeared to make a more frequent use of the adverb than the other NNS groups (see Table 2). Contrary to Biber and Staple's (2014) findings, this adverb was not used more frequently by NNSs than by NSs as no significant differences were found between the frequency of use of *actually* between the NS data and two of the learner groups. The post-hoc tests showed that the frequency of use of *actually* was significantly different between the German group and all the other groups, but the differences were higher among NNSs: between the German and the Chinese speakers, and between the German and Spanish speakers. NS speakers used the adverb quite more often than both Chinese and Spanish speakers but comparisons of means did not show any significant difference, possibly due to the distribution of the attested uses across the number of speakers.

Regarding its pragmatic meaning, NS, Chinese and German speakers seemed to favour the use of this adverb to signal factuality, while the Spanish speakers gave equal distribution of use to elaboration/clarification, factuality and emphasis pragmatic meanings. This seems to suggest that this group of speakers (SP) favoured a different distribution of meanings when compared to the other speakers (see Table 5), although the low frequency of use requires that this interpretation be taken cautiously.

Regarding position, the German group was the most similar to the NS group and their preferred position for *actually* was phrasal (62%) as in the NS dataset (68%). On the contrary the Chinese preferred clausal initial position in 60% of the occurrences, while the Spanish learners chose final clausal position in 67% of the instances analysed (see Table 5) and initial clausal in 33% . From these findings, we can conclude that *actually* presents a complex picture where different groups of speakers seemed to favour different uses and positions

5.2.4. *Frequency of use and pragmatic meanings: the big picture*

Our analysis of three high frequency certainty adverbs across NS and NNS speech yields a complex picture of frequency of use as well as pragmatic meanings and

adverb positions. First, our research shows that, on average, only 30.6% of the English native speakers used one of the three adverbs analysed, which suggests that in non-elicited contexts, such as the picture description task, the use of these high frequency adverbs is not endorsed by the majority of the speakers analysed (n=78). Differences are particularly dramatic in the case of *really*, where 80 % of the German speakers, or 53.2 % of the Spanish, used it, while only 33 % of the English speakers used this adverb. Our research shows that these NNSs rely more heavily on this adverb. Interestingly, the range and diversity of pragmatic meanings expressed is more restricted than the ones observed in the NS group. Also, clausal position was favoured by NSs, while NNSs preferred phrasal uses. Frequency-wise, we can argue that it is only in the use of *obviously* that NS showed a totally different tendency, where 34.6% made use of this adverb, with the German group far behind and 12% of speakers using it. We can conclude that, in spoken English, it is not always the case that NSs use certainty adverbs more often than NNSs. This finding needs to be confined to the type of task analysed, *really* and *actually* adverbs and, most importantly, to the groups of NNSs in this study.

Second, the task type may have influenced the pragmatic meanings displayed by NSs. This is the case of *obviously*, where only epistemic meanings were relevant and there was little or no evidence of non-physical evidence meanings. We suggest that this type of task may be understood as a distinct linguistic genre (Author, 2015) that affords the use of a type of language which does not necessarily coincide with other widely researched genres like conversation. Both, in the cases of *really* and *actually*, we found that NNSs tended to use a more restricted set of pragmatic meanings: boosting and factuality, respectively. Despite the differences, German speakers showed a tendency to replicate the pragmatic meanings and positions of *actually* used by the NSs, although the use of this adverb was more widely widespread in the German group (44%) than in the English (24.4%).

6. Conclusion

Our research sheds new light on how NSs and NNSs of English use certainty adverbs in the same task in spoken communication. While *obviously* is essentially

used by English speakers only, *really* is used significantly more frequently by German speakers than by NS, Chinese and Spanish speakers. *Actually* is used similarly by NSs and some NNSs, as its frequency is not significantly different between NSs and two of the NNS datasets. However, German speakers used it significantly more than Spanish or Chinese speakers. It is interesting to note that NSs and Chinese frequencies of use for both *actually* and *really* are not significantly different, which reinforces the notion that, quantitatively, these two groups of speakers approached the picture task in ways that diverged from the German and Spanish speakers. This finding also points to the need to further analyse how these groups of speakers make use of other adverbs and, particularly, adverbial constructions.

Regarding pragmatic meaning, an examination of the pragmatic contexts of use of the certainty adverbs revealed that both NSs and NNSs restricted their choice to classic epistemic meanings, contradicting previous research about those adverbs in English L1. Further research should explore the relationship between the L1 of the speakers and the realisation of certainty to analyse whether there is pragmatic fossilisation depending on the L1 of speakers, or whether different L1 speakers use the adverbs as they are used in their respective L1. In terms of the adequacy of the categories analysed, our research lends evidence to the fact that moderation was needed in, approximately, 10% of the cases. Overlapping or unclear categories may be challenging to raters, but moderation seems to be an interesting option in terms of triangulating annotation results. In terms of language education, these findings challenge previous stereotypes about the contrast between NSs and NNSs adverb use establishing differences also among different NNS groups. These results call for (1) a reconceptualization of the teaching of certainty adverbs, in particular *obviously* and *actually,* across different NNS groups, a (2) rethinking of the impact of task types on the range of language that may be generated by speakers, both learners and NSs, and, last but not least, (3) more attention to how adverbs contribute to meaning creation in spoken discourse.

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